

Legal Aid Link

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FY10 Budget Campaign Kick-off!

What a difference three months make. In July, we were thrilled with the FY09 budget the Governor signed, which included a \$1.4 million increase in the MLAC line item. Since early September, however, we have been shoring up our arguments as to why legal aid should remain outside of the Governor's budget cuts if he is granted authority to alter the legislative and judicial budgets. (MLAC's appropriation is under the judiciary.) Last week MLAC convened a meeting with Ben Clements, the Governor's Chief Legal Counsel, to impress upon him how critical it is that the MLAC line item remain intact. Many thanks to the programs who supplied us with the hard data we needed to make our case with the Governor - the numbers are impressive and highlight the important work that goes on in the legal aid community every day.

While we are doing what we can to insure that the FY09 appropriation remains intact, at the same time the [Equal Justice Coalition](#) (EJC) has launched its FY10 budget campaign. MLAC will be requesting a \$1 million increase in the FY10 appropriation. This will be an uphill battle in the current economic environment, but due to the steep drop in IOLTA income as well as the increased demand for services, a million more dollars is the amount needed to simply *maintain* the current level of client service that the programs provide. Stay tuned as we plow through what is sure to be a tough budget year.

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Get to Know MLAC Staff!



This is a new section featuring MLAC staff members who may not directly or frequently interact with the Massachusetts legal aid programs. We are kicking off another legislative budget campaign, so we thought it made sense to highlight the work of the two staff members coordinating it all: Pattye Comfort (right) and Heather Catherwood!

[Heather Catherwood](#)

What are some things you're working on leading up to Walk to the Hill?

"I am preparing for the first annual [law student event](#), supporting the effort to recruit

county and specialty bar associations to co-sponsor Walk to the Hill and helping with the planning for the Walk to the Hill Captain's lunch."

What's something you work on outside of legal services?

"I am a member of the Massachusetts Promise Fellowship Advisory Board."

Tell us something you hope to accomplish with your legal aid endeavors.

"One of the goals of my work is to encourage law students to show their support for civil legal service, so I think it would be pretty incredible if at least one graduating law student decided to pursue a career in public interest in part because of participation in our campaign."

Pattye Comfort

What are a few things you're currently working on?

"Right now I am identifying all of our firm 'captains' for the upcoming Walk to the Hill. Last year 42 firms formally participated, and I hope to get all 42 back and add a few more. I'm also working on our annual captain lunch, which is being held on December 3rd. The lunch is sponsored by a law firm and is our way of thanking the captains for their work in organizing the 2008 Walk. We also use the time to brainstorm for the upcoming Walk. Each year we give awards to the firms who had the best attendance. This year first place goes to WilmerHale, and the percentage award goes to Jim Re, our captain at Sally & Fitch."

Name one thing legal aid staff might not know about you.

"I'm a member of Volunteer Lawyers Project's *pro bono* panel."

What do you like about working in legal services?

"In a cynical and self-centered world, I count myself lucky to work within the legal services community which is always focused on doing right by others."

Client Council News

Holiday Social Event

The Client Council will host a social gathering in December for its members. The dinner will be a great opportunity for client board members from across the state to interact. More details will be announced soon.

GBLS Facilitation

The Client Council staff has been meeting with the GBLS Client Caucus to discuss issues important to its members. There have been two meetings so far with more meetings planned for the near future. The meetings have been successful in empowering clients to be a part of the legal services community.

Diversity Coalition News

Last Month's Harassment Prevention and Investigation Training

On September 26, the Diversity Coalition offered a one-day training on harassment prevention and conducting investigations. More than 25 Project Directors, Affirmative Action Officers and other staff attended, representing nearly every legal services program in Massachusetts. The workshop was facilitated by Debora Bloom, an expert in workplace diversity, harassment prevention, cultural competence, and leadership

development. The day-long workshop consisted of a morning session focusing on harassment prevention and an afternoon session focusing on investigations. Participants examined the fine line between illegal and inappropriate workplace behavior, analyzed hypothetical situations, and explored the limits of confidentiality as it relates to allegations. The training stressed each organization's legal responsibility to prevent harassment, as well as its obligation to educate staff members about its harassment policies and procedures. Participants learned the necessary steps involved in both filing a complaint and conducting an investigation.

[Upcoming Project Directors Diversity Training](#)

On October 30, Project Directors from nearly every legal services program in Massachusetts will convene in Framingham for a two-part, day-long diversity training. The morning session will build on last fall's "Let's Get REAL About Diversity" training, continuing to explore issues of power and privilege as they relate to leadership styles and organizational culture. Project Directors will also be introduced to the concept of "micro-inequities," which can be described as those small messages that can (often unknowingly) convey disrespect and inequality. The afternoon portion of the training will focus on strategies for hiring diverse candidates, skills on how to review resumes with an eye on diversity, and effective interviewing techniques.

[Next Up in the Let's Get REAL Series](#)

The Diversity Coalition is excited to announce the next workshop in the "Let's Get REAL About Diversity" series: "Let's Get REAL About Generations in the Workplace." This new series will focus on age, ageism, and intergenerational dynamics in the workplace. Stay tuned for more details.

Equal Justice Coalition

[Walk to the Hill Turns 10](#)

The 10th anniversary of the Walk to the Hill for Legal Aid will be held at the State House on **January 22, 2009**. To say that the EJC's annual lobby day has enjoyed tremendous support from the private bar is indeed an understatement: for each of the past 9 years, the private bar has turned out in numbers that have exceeded the previous year's attendance. 75 attorneys participated in the first Walk in 1999. The 2008 Walk drew a record 600 attorneys. We're looking forward to working with our law firm supporters again this year to convey to the Legislature the critical importance of legal aid funding.

[Calling All Law Students!](#)

On November 6th, the Equal Justice Coalition will host the first annual "**Law Students for Justice: Kick-off Recruitment Event**" at the Boston Bar Association. Law school students from the Boston area law schools will have an opportunity to network and learn about ways they can be involved with the Equal Justice Coalition's campaign, particularly ways they can participate in Walk to the Hill. Julia Huston, Chair of the Equal Justice Coalition, and Stephanie Balandis, a housing attorney from Greater Boston Legal Services, will speak to students about the importance of civil legal aid funding.

The Buzz

[Community Legal Services and Counseling Center \(CLSACC\)](#)

In September, [CLSACC](#) hired **Lauren Shebairo**, LICSW, MPH, as a social worker to

provide casework and counseling for immigrant and refugee victims of crime. Lauren is working with CLSACC's legal staff, particularly in our immigration and family law units, to assist these clients. She earned her MSW at Boston University in 2004 and her MPH in 2008.

Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS)

[GBLS](#) recently named **Nadine Cohen** the Managing Attorney of their Consumer Rights Unit. For more than 20 years, Nadine has litigated numerous housing discrimination cases in federal and state courts. She originally worked for GBLS from 1976 to 1986 as a paralegal and attorney. She also has worked in private practice and for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law.



Zoe Cronin, Housing Unit Attorney, was selected as a Public Interest Leader by the Boston Bar Association, one of 15 "rising stars" who were admitted to the BBA's leadership development program for lawyers with fewer than 10 years of experience.

Mary Frasca, Elder Law Unit Paralegal, was selected to receive the Boston Area Agency on Aging Commission on Affairs of the Elderly Edward L. Cooper Award for Outstanding Advocate. This award recognizes an individual, business or agency which has demonstrated "dedication, caring and generosity in support of the elder community in Boston."



Wynn Gerhard, Elder Law Unit Managing Attorney, was also selected to receive the Boston Area Agency on Aging Commission on Affairs of the Elderly Edward L. Cooper Award for Outstanding Advocate. In addition, Attorney Gerhard was nominated to the national Elder Rights Advocacy Hall of Fame by the Boston Partnership for Older Adults, Elder Protection Group. The Hall recognizes those who have advanced the legal rights of our nation's over-60 population, or a significant segment thereof.



Maureen Serio, Housing Unit Administrative Secretary/Legal Assistant, was selected to receive one of the Unsung Heroes awards by *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly*. She has been chosen as Secretary of the Year.

Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts (LACCM)

[LACCM](#) is pleased to welcome **Alexandra Melendez** as LACCM's AmeriCorps intern for the 2008-2009 school year. Alex recently graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno with a degree in political science and Spanish, and she plans to apply to law school next year. At LACCM, Alex works on various community lawyering projects, assists in the administrative coordination of the Probate & Family Court Lawyer for the Day program, and provides general support to LACCM's advocacy staff.

For the third year in a row, LACCM will collaborate with students at **Northeastern University School of Law** through the school's Legal Skills in Social Context program. This program pairs non-profit organizations with a class of first-year law students to conduct legal research and field research on a topic of the organization's choosing. This year's project will seek to expand opportunities for minority-owned businesses, particularly immigrant-owned businesses, so that they can fully participate in the economic and civic life of the City of Worcester.

MetroWest Legal Services (MWLS)

Starting October 20th, **Amanda Lopez** will join [MWLS](#) as the new KidsCare Connection case manager. She is bilingual in Spanish and English and has a bachelor's degree from UMass in psychology.

MWLS has two exciting upcoming events:

You're invited... See the new space and meet the new Executive Director, Betsy Soule, at an **Open House** on Thursday, November 6th, from 4:30 to 6:30pm. The event will be held at the new MWLS office at 63 Fountain Street, Suite 304, in Framingham. Light refreshments will be served, and bring your business card for a chance to win a door prize. RSVP to lparra@mwlegal.org or (508) 620-1830.

Just in time for the holidays... From December 1st to the 15th, MWLS will host its Third Annual **Holiday Online Auction**. Featured items include: two "Arrive & Drive" racing packages to F1 Boston; a \$100 gift certificate to Splash; and "Yastrzemski", written by Yaz and complete with a DVD. These would make great gifts! To participate, go to www.mwlegal.org/auction.htm and click "Auction Updates."

National Consumer Law Center (NCLC)

Among [NCLC](#) successes the past couple of months: the Department of Public Utilities issued an order which will increase the overall value of low income utility discount rates by \$20 - 31 million dollars a year; together with New Hampshire Legal Assistance, the Center convened an emergency meeting of New England advocates and public officials in anticipation of the staggeringly scary home heating oil crisis this winter; and NCLC helped secure millions in additional Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) dollars for Massachusetts. Good work!

After months of rehabilitation on the Center's new old building, staff moved across the street and into a new home at 7 Winthrop Square in downtown Boston. Please come by and take a tour. The Center also added some new staff: **Geoff Walsh** joined the advocacy staff after many years of stellar legal work at Vermont Legal Aid and Community Legal Services in Philadelphia; **John Van Alst**, a specialist in auto fraud law and manufactured housing, moved from Washington, D.C. to the Boston office; **Tamar Malloy** replaced **Mallory SoRelle** (who enrolled at the Kennedy School of

Government) as research assistant; **Claire Bolton** is the new development assistant (replacing **Ava Morgenstern**, who is doing good work in Peru); **Cassandra Roeder** is the new publications assistant; and **Toni Fisher** fills the new position of financial assistant.

Americans for Fairness in Lending (AFFIL), though now an independent organization, is still located at the Consumer Law Center. Its concerns with the foreclosure crises and predatory lending have made its work all the more important and high profile. Please check out its website at www.AFFIL.org, and consider joining.

Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS)

[NLS](#) recently welcomed several new faces. **Elizabeth Rosario** began work in the Lynn office in June 2008, as part of the Intake Unit. Elizabeth, who is bilingual in English and Spanish, recently received her bachelor's degree from Salem State College. She was in the US Army Reserves and has worked for a private law practice in Lynn and at Bridgwell as a case manager.

Attorney **June Beack** joined NLS in July as a Bart Gordon Fellow. (The Bart Gordon Fellowship is an MLAC-funded program designed to provide increased opportunities for attorneys from diverse backgrounds to join legal services.) June is bilingual in Spanish and proficient in French, Korean and Portuguese. NLS has been working with groups in Lawrence and Lowell on immigrant justice initiatives and June will be joining them in that work. She'll also be representing individual client.

Ron Mendes started at NLS as a Finance Officer on September 1. Ron has been the Town Treasurer and Collector for the Town of Wilmington for the past eight years. Prior to his municipal work, he worked in higher education finance at Emerson and Simmons Colleges. In addition to his work in finance, Ron became an attorney in 2006. NLS also welcomed attorney **Mark Sampson** to the Housing Unit in late September. Mark is a litigator with more than 20 years of trial experience, and NLS looks forward to having him on their team. **Laura Gallant** returned to NLS after a one-year position at MLRI where she worked on food stamp advocacy.

NLS recently said good-bye to several valued advocates. **Jen Hayden**, a housing attorney, departed from NLS at the end of June to take a wonderful opportunity at a private practice in Maine doing consumer-side bankruptcy, affirmative litigation, and foreclosure and predatory lending work. NLS will miss Jen's passion for justice, compassion for clients, and willingness to work so hard for equal justice.

Elizabeth Silver, benefits attorney, who had joined us for a one year temporary position, has returned to Western Massachusetts and is now working full time on the presidential campaign.

Patricio Rossi left NLS in October to join the Civil Rights Division at the Office of the Attorney General. Patricio came to NLS as a law student in 2003, later returned as a Berkley Law Fellow, and started the Lawyer for a Day Project in the Northeast Housing Court. NLS's loss is the AG's gain!

Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP)

[VLP](#) has been awarded a three-year grant as part of the Pro Bono Institute's Second Acts® initiative and will establish an innovative and replicable model to engage transitioning and retired attorneys in significant, volunteer public interest law

opportunities. VLP was chosen as one of four pilot projects. Other projects are in New York, San Francisco and Milwaukee.

Leslie Walker, Executive Director of Massachusetts Correctional Legal Services (MCLS), and **Meg Connolly**, Executive Director of VLP, have been included in the inaugural class of "Women of Justice", an honor co-sponsored by *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly* with the Women's Bar Association and the Massachusetts Association of Women Lawyers. They will be honored at a gala luncheon on December 5, at the Intercontinental Hotel.

Western Massachusetts Legal Services (WMLS)

Several [WMLS](#) staff recently received accolades. **Teresa Vazquez**, a paralegal in the Springfield office, has been nominated for *Massachusetts Lawyer's Weekly* Unsung Heroes Award. **Jan Stiefel**, staff attorney in the Northampton office, has been accepted as a Fellow of the Leadership Institute, sponsored by Center for Legal Aid Education, and **Tina Sanchez**, Litigation Director in the Springfield office, has been accepted as a Mentor.

WMLS welcomes four new AmeriCorps legal advocates as part of the statewide Massachusetts Legal Assistance for Self-Sufficiency Project (MLASSP). In Berkshire County - **Jeff Adams**; in Hampden County - **Anielka Sanchez** and **Tom Ha**; and in Franklin/Hampshire Counties - **John Shriver**.

MLAC News

MLAC Board Member Wins Award

Martha Koster is the 2008 recipient of the Victor J. Garo Public Service Award. She accepted the award "for her lifelong commitment and dedication to public service" at the [Annual BU Law Pro Bono Kick-off](#). Congratulations, Martha!

Communications and Fundraising News

We are in the process of planning a two-part grant writing seminar for early 2009. One half-day session will focus on prospecting and stewardship, and the other session will be an in-depth tutorial on writing grants. Stay tuned for details!

Don't Forget!

Need to look up contact information for legal services staff and programs? Don't forget that you can use the online directory at www.masslegalservices.org, which contains the most up-to-date contact information for Massachusetts Legal Services staff. You first need to log-in to the site (located on the upper right of the page), and then the searchable Staff Directory will be located on the right. Alternatively, once you are logged-in, you can click on "[Directory](#)" at the top of the page to see a list of programs and their staff lists. Please note that staff contact information is only visible to Massachusetts Legal Services staff and cannot be accessed by the public.

Important Dates

October 23 - MLAC board meeting (NCLC/ 7 Winthrop Square, 4th Floor)

October 27 - Northeast Recognition Lunch (NLS/Lawrence)

November 5 - Southeast Recognition Lunch (SCCLS/New Bedford)
November 18 - MLAC board meeting (Massachusetts Bar Association)
January 14 - Community Mapping Project Briefings (State House and MLAC office)
January 22 - Walk to the Hill (State House)
February 12 - Constituent Services Briefing (State House)

[Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation](#)

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